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OMEGA 7
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Jury selection started Monday for the trial of the reputed leader of the anti-Castro terrorist group Omega 7, who has waited more than a year in prison to answer charges that he masterminded 30 bombings and two killings by the Cuban exile group.

Federal authorities claim Eduardo Arocena once confessed to being the terrorist code-named "Omar," leader of Omega 7. The FBI asserts he met with agents two years ago to inform against a rival Omega 7 faction.

Arocena has denied informing, insisting in a pre-trial hearing that he is a victim of a "monstrous conspiracy" in which the government hopes to "blackmail" him into turning against the anti-Castro movement.

One defense lawyer said in a hearing last year that the FBI duped Arocena by promising to strengthen Omega 7 for its fight against Cuban President Fidel Castro, and Arocena once claimed to have been acting as a CIA agent.

Following his refusal to inform, Arocena was charged with a long list of crimes in a 26-count indictment and in separate indictments in Miami.

Arocena, 41, would face a mandatory term of life in prison if convicted of the most serious charge against him, the murder of Cuban embassy attache Felix Garcia Rodriguez in the New York City borough of Queens in 1980.

After his purported meetings with the FBI, Arocena eluded agents for nine months until his arrest in Miami on July 22, 1983. He has been imprisoned since then, unable to raise his \$750,000 bail.

He is now so unyielding that he has refused even the routine agreements reached in a trial - for example, to concede that the widely publicized bombings actually occurred.

As a result, prosecutors have had to prepare evidence of each bombing and say the trial is likely to last eight to 10 weeks.

A series of bombings in New York, New Jersey and Florida began in 1975. Targets included Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Soviet and Cuban missions to the United Nations, businesses that dealt with Cuba, and a Soviet ship anchored at Port Elizabeth, N.J.

Arocena also is accused of attempting to murder Raul Roa-Kouri, Cuban ambassador to the United Nations, in Manhattan in 1980.

He is charged with lying to a federal grand jury by denying involvement in the murder of Eulalio Jose Negrin, a member of the Committee of 75, which negotiated with Castro for release of political prisoners. Negrin, slain in Union City, N.J. in 1979, was shot as his 12-year-old son watched.

The former New Jersey longshoreman also is charged in a racketeering conspiracy count alleging that Omega 7 raised money by acting as collection agent for Florida drug dealers.

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Arocena's lawyer, Humberto Aguilar, tried unsuccessfully before the trial to bar the government from using his alleged statements to the FBI as evidence. Aguilar now says he is prepared to counter the statements.

Arocena has dropped plans to assert he was a CIA agent. He filed papers making the claim, then backed off, explaining in court his concern for "the consequences of having to reveal in public ... secrets of a very sensitive nature, that would be rather embarrassing for governments ... and I would be very hurt if that were to occur."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael L. Tabak has responded that the CIA denies any connection with Omega 7.

Arocena waited an unusually long time for a trial because his attorneys changed frequently - one dropped out after an unrelated indictment in Miami charging illegal possession of a weapon. Others were disqualified because they represented other Omega 7 suspects, and one was dismissed by Arocena, who believed the lawyer wanted him to cooperate.

Arocena also tried unsuccessfully last month to remove Aguilar, who requested a psychiatric examination of Arocena because of his "anti-communism psychosis." Arocena refused to be examined.

Aguilar said he and Arocena now are getting along "splendidly."